

Greetings From The Faculty On The Installation of  
Joshua Lederberg As President Of The Rockefeller University

By Purnell W. Choppin

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We welcome today a new president of the institution conceived and reared as The Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research and matured as The Rockefeller University. On this same date, October 16, in 1914, a dinner was given honoring the first director, Simon Flexner, on the tenth anniversary of the opening of the laboratories. On that occasion Frederick Gates, the remarkable man who played the seminal role in the establishment of this institution, perceiving the great need and guiding Mr. Rockefeller in its foundation, gave an eloquent description of the Institute. "Here is an institution whose value touches the life of every man that lives....Here at least, is a work for all humanity.... Your vocation goes to the foundation of life itself."

Only four other exceptional men have headed this institution in its long history of contributions to knowledge and the human condition. Each was a pioneer in research, a distinguished scholar and statesman of science, and a dedicated steward of the unique environment created by the founder in which scientists were brought together with the resources and freedom to pursue their investigations into the mechanisms of life and disease, unfettered by extraneous burdens. Such an environment has the strength inherent in the wisdom of its design, but is also fragile because of ever present pressures toward conformity to the norm. It thus requires the guiding hand of one who understands its nature.

Our new president joins a truly select group, and brings his outstanding talents to bear on the opportunities and problems which characterize science and society today. Like Simon Flexner, Joshua Lederberg began his career as a microbiologist, but his interests have expanded to such a degree that he is in the unusual position of being able to communicate in depth concerning a broad spectrum of the activities here, from behavioral sciences, to molecular and cell biology, to computer sciences and physics. The faculty welcomes such a man.

Although never formally associated before assuming the presidency, he has long been represented here in distinguished fashion by both a scientific antecedent and a descendant, his mentor and fellow Nobel Laureate, the late Edward Tatum, and his most outstanding graduate student, Norton Zinder. Thus, in joining this community he completes a chain of three exceptional scientific generations, in the true Rockefeller tradition.

Each of Dr. Lederberg's predecessors assumed leadership at an opportune but critical time in the development of science and its relationship to society, and today is no exception. Granting agencies are committing more to basic and applied research than ever before, and yet it is increasingly difficult to obtain adequate funds. In recent years many of our brightest young men and women have been attracted to science, and yet the opportunities available on completion of their training are diminishing. An explosive growth in knowledge of basic mechanisms has put us on the threshold of an understanding undreamed of a few years ago, and yet the pressures for narrowly-targeted research and for pursuing the latest scientific fad are relentlessly increasing. The development of new technologies holds promise of enormous dividends at both basic and applied levels, and yet layers of ill-advised regulation have threatened to limit the search for knowledge. The public and Congress are understandably calling for a speed-up in technology transfer from the laboratory to the bedside, and yet a prime resource for bringing this about is diminishing. The number of clinically well-trained people who obtain extensive experience in basic biomedical research before returning to clinical departments is less today than a decade ago.

Thus, we look forward to an era of unparalleled opportunity for exploration and progress, but at no time since its early years has it been more important than now to have an institution such as this, an institution whose diversity may be

limited, but its excellence, never, where scholars in autonomous laboratories, can, as Flexner said, "search where and how they will" for the benefit of mankind, and, most importantly, an institution with a continued influx of outstanding young men and women from throughout the world, for innovative science is particularly the business of the young.

Although this is a time of great challenge and opportunity, in the words of John D. Rockefeller, Jr., "every opportunity implies an obligation", and it is our increasing responsibility to make the case for research to the public, to justify society's increasing investment, to explain the importance of an understanding of the basic mechanisms of life and nature to the treatment, control, and prevention of man's ills, to convey the importance of the simple need to know and understand, and to do our part in showing that science enriches our culture and enhances the quality of life, in addition to spawning technology. Such activities have long been an abiding interest of Joshua Lederberg.

The faculty is aware of its responsibility to not only obtain grant support from federal agencies, but also participate actively in efforts to attract the increasingly vital, less restricted funds from private sources, and we pledge to the President and Trustees, our continued efforts in this important task, which provides an excellent opportunity to perform a service to the University while discharging in some part our obligation to inform the public concerning our activities and our goals.

In the seventy-seven years of its existence The Rockefeller University has amply confirmed the wisdom of its founders and fulfilled the promise they envisioned, but in science more than any other human endeavor, a promise made is a debt unpaid. We enter a new era under a new president with the confidence of a job well done and a determination that matches the limitless opportunities before us.

Daniel Webster in defending the charter of Dartmouth College before the Supreme Court in 1819, said, "It is, sir, only a small college, and yet there are those who love it." One can easily paraphrase that with respect to Rockefeller: "It is a small, unique university, and yet there are many who love it, and all those privileged to spend some time here have been enriched by it."

Frederick Gates remarked with an enthusiasm characteristic of his feeling for this institution, "The Rockefeller Institute is the most interesting thing in the world."

President Lederberg, as you assume the helm from Fred Seitz, who has steered our craft in a steadfast and skillful manner through the troubled social, academic, and financial waters of the past decade, it is my privilege and pleasure to welcome you on behalf of the faculty to "the most interesting place in the world."